o promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which here in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization."*

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CHRISTIAN MUTUAL AID
A Factor in Church and Community Development

By J. Winfield Fretz*

"Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways,
and be wise." Proverbs 6:6.

Mutual aid is a very old practice in human history. We may say that aid is mutual when two or more individuals work together to achieve a common good. Mutual aid is a reciprocal process in that it benefits all parties concerned, in other words, the beneficial currents flow simultaneously in opposite directions. The idea of working together to accomplish desired goals is much older than the idea of working alone. In a very real sense, mutual aid is a fundamental law of the universe. As such it is an inherent part of God's creation.

The earliest historical records reveal that ancient peoples lived in groups such as small communities, tribes, and families. They had a very simple way of life in comparison with the complex and highly intricate life of today. Yet an essential characteristic of their way of life was their sharing of the dangers, the sorrows, the joys, and the bounties of life with one another. The extreme individualism so characteristic of modern life was utterly unknown to ancient peoples. It is not found today among the more simple cultures and civilizations.

Mutual Aid and Cooperation

In many ways the terms "mutual aid" and "cooperation" are synonymous. They may be used interchangeably. Some people would define mutual aid as "the idea of innate cooperation." While mutual aid is always cooperation, cooperation may sometimes not be mutual aid. The distinction, though subtle, must be made. It often happens that two or more individuals cooperate with one another

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*Dr. J. Winfield Fretz is Professor of Social Science at Bethel College and a leader in rural life emphasis in the General Conference of the Mennonite Church. This issue of The Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin has been condensed from the booklet written by Dr. Fretz, based upon his careful study of mutual aid in the United States, Canada, and Latin America. We are deeply grateful to Dr. Fretz for kind permission to quote freely from "Christian Mutual Aid," 90 pages, price 25¢; published by the Mennonite Central Committee, Akron, Pa.

to attain a common goal but they do so for basically selfish purposes. This is illustrated in our highly interdependent economic system of today where employer and employee, consumers and producers, professional men and their clients, may cooperate to attain a particular objective but, strictly speaking, one could not define it as mutual aid because the motives may be basically selfish. The prima concern of each group is for the welfare of itself and not for the other. In genuine Christian mutual aid, there is as much concern for the other person or group as for one's own. Wherever mutual aid is practiced, it is concerned with the total good rather than with the partial good. In other words, the group wel fare will take precedence over the individual welfare. . . .

Our concern in the discussion of mutual aid is that we as Christian people, who talk about being good neighbors and about brotherhood and stewardshi and about serving Christ, actually make a transfer from religious ideals and doc trinal professions to our everyday work and business practices. It is our con- cern that our businesses are operated and our jobs filled with the same pure spi and the same high purposes with which we operate our churches. Our prayer is th all these things be done in the name of Christ for the glory of God. As church workers, we serve not for personal profit and prestige but because there is need of our time and our energy and our service for God's work. As Christians we mus strive for the things we pray for. "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on eart as it is in heaven." We are coworkers together with God. A living faith is a working faith.

Mutual aid, like competition, is a form of striving, but in the case o mutual aid it is striving with others to achieve a common good rather than striv ing against others for the sake of gaining personal advantage. Of course, not a forms of competition are necessarily harmful. The motives behind the striving i every case determine whether they are good or bad, harmful or helpful.

Mutual Aid Is Not Charity

It is important that a distinction be made between mutual aid and char ty. We have said that mutual aid is a two-way relationship in which currents of service flow in two directions. Charity is often a one-way relationship where the currents of service flow only in one direction. The rich give to the poor; the well-fed give to the hungry; those clothed in silk give to those in rags. The two groups are likely to have little in common. They tend to live each in a world apart. Those who have are likely to look pityingly and, all too often, wi condescension upon those who have not. Those who are in need are likely to look with mixed feelings of gratitude and covetousness upon those from whom they re- ceive. There is little the two groups have in common.

The people who constantly receive have no way of repaying those who give. Therefore, they tend to lose self-respect and, often, respect for those from whom they receive as well. Let us put ourselves in the shoes of those who receive charity and see whether we could retain our own self-respect if over a period of time we would be recipients only. Most worthy people do not like to be on the receiving end of charity very long. They generally accept charity in the hope that it will reestablish them and make them able to be self-sufficient.

As givers, we frequently never really see the people to whom we give. We are not in face-to-face relationship with them. The giving is, therefore, im personal. We give to a cause rather than to an individual, and we continue giv- ing never knowing whether we pauperize the individual or whether we rehabilitate him.

The loss of self-respect through constant receiving of charity was illustrated in the depression years by people who preferred to starve slowly rather than accept relief. To accept relief would have meant a loss of self-respect and a loss of group-respect.

We are concerned with mutual aid rather than charity. Each has its place in the program of the church, but mutual aid, unlike charity, has been very much a stranger in the program of the current church. The purpose of mutual aid is to help needy church people to help themselves rather than to give them direct relief. Mutual aid is a program designed to help set people on their own feet economically and spiritually so that they can in turn become stronger members of the Christian body and bear their share of the load in church and community. As Paul says: "But that as a matter of equality, your abundance at the present time should supply their want, so that their abundance may supply your want, that there may be equality." II Corinthians 8:14.

Why the Church Is Interested in Mutual Aid

The primary function of the church is to preach the gospel of salvation to all mankind. The church is the organized body of believers in Jesus Christ, and as such it must preach repentance from sin, but it must also teach its own members right ways of living and earning a living. It must be concerned with showing the "better way" of which Paul speaks.

A basic assumption underlying this pamphlet and the accompanying emphasis on mutual aid among Mennonites is that the Mennonite Church desires to continue teaching and practicing the doctrines of separation of church and state, of nonresistance, of non-conformity to a secular world, and of simplicity of living. This assumption must be accepted in order to appreciate the purpose of this pamphlet which is to encourage the development of a program of Christian mutual aid among Mennonites. This emphasis is a conscious effort to move in an opposite direction to the secular currents of our time. It assumes that the church as a brotherhood can and will meet as many of its problems independent of government assistance as possible; that the church will accept increasingly less rather than more by way of patronage, favors, and financial advantage from the state; and that it will seek to meet its economic and social needs through mutual assistance on the part of its people. . . .

As Christians, we hardly realize how far we have discarded the laws of Christ in favor of the laws of the market. In fact, many make no distinction between the two. The aim of this pamphlet is to help Christian people discover ways of aiding one another in Christ. Christian mutual aid is a program aimed to spiritualize our economic practices, to put a soul into our vocation and daily work....

The Bible and Mutual Aid

> "They shall sit every man under his own vine and
> under his fig tree; and none small make them afraid."
> Micah 4:4.

When we look for evidences of mutual aid in the Old Testament, we are rewarded with abundant illustrations. It is well to remember that Hebrew society in Old Testament times was strongly dependent upon the kinship institutions of the family, the clan, and the tribe. These institutions were the center of Jewish life. Primary attention was paid to the family and the tribe rather than to the individual. This accounts, in part, for the many evidences of mutual aid

among the Hebrew people. Religion, government, and economics were all intimatel related. . . .

The building of the walls around Jerusalem under the leadership of Nehemiah is an illustration of mutual aid on a large scale. Here, too, in spite opposition and ridicule, it was only because of determination and cooperation that the huge task was completed. (Nehemiah, chapters 2-6.) . . . .

In the book of Deuteronomy, we find that the owner of a vineyard had to allow a poor man the right to eat as many grapes as he cared for while workin in the vineyard, although the hired man was not permitted to carry any away with him. (Deuteronomy 23:25.) The tenth part of the yield of every third year was to be kept for the members in the brotherhood who needed it, such as the poor, the widows, the orphans, and the strangers. (Deuteronomy 14:28.) In Deuteronom 22:1-4 the laws of the brotherhood were further outlined in these words:

"You must not see your fellow countryman's ox or sheep go astray without showing concern for it; you must be sure to take it home to your fellow countryman. If, however, your fellow countryman is not a tribesman of yours and you do not know him, you must take it home with you, and keep it until your fellow countryman claims it: then you must give it back to him. You must do the same with his ass, with his garment, and anything lost by a fellow countryman of your which he has lost and you have found; you are not to be without concern for it. . ." (Goodspeed Translation.)

We see here a sense of responsibility for assistance to men beyond the boundaries of the tribe or race. Hebrew religion had risen to a high ethical plane. In the mind of the Hebrews, mutual concern for each other's welfare was considered the will of God.

The emphasis of Jesus' teaching was on the general principle of Christian brotherhood. Emphasis on mutual aid, therefore, is implied rather than specifically stated. When Jesus instructs his disciples to go forth, he tells them they are not to be burdened with such material matters as money, extra clothing, or food. He assures them that those to whom they will preach will provide for their needs. (Matthew 10:8ff.) The principle of mutual aid is very clearly enunciated by Jesus in the parable of the Good Samaritan when he defined the meaning of neighbor to the young lawyer who sought the way to eternal life.

The principle of mutual aid in the New Testament is perhaps best expressed in the Book of Acts. The principle can be summarized as "each according to ability and each according to his need.". . . In Acts 20:35 Paul mentions how he has always worked with his hands to support himself and his companions, yet h points out that Christians should be concerned with people other than themselves

In writing to the Romans, Paul emphasizes Jesus' teachings of the Sermon on the Mount and tells his fellow Christians to supply the needs of God's people. In Romans 13:8 he says: "Owe nobody anything except the duty of mutual love." In Romans 15:1-2 he says that it is the duty of those who are strong to put up with the handicaps of those who are weak and that we ought not to seek to please ourselves only but to do good to our neighbor and help in his development

Present-Day Needs for Mutual Need

> "Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ." Galatians 6:2.

The need for bearing one another's burdens in a material and a spiritual sense is as great today as it ever was. Mutual aid as a Christian practice is never out of date. The spirit of love and brotherhood needs to saturate men so thoroughly that it will become the basic motivation for every act of their lives. Many of the apostolic Christians and many of our Mennonite forefathers seem to have been so saturated. They were more continually God-conscious than most Christians in our time seem to be. Brotherhood was not merely a name which one occasionally used as another way of referring to the church. Brotherhood was their business. As members of the reborn in Christ, they felt constrained always to love and serve the brotherhood. This fact is reflected in their attitude toward property, toward charging or receiving interest, and in their willingness to share house and home and all material goods with those who were in need....

The purpose of these few suggestions may stimulate the imagination of our people to become an effective leaven in the total life of the church. Christian mutual aid should again become the distinguishing characteristic of the way true disciples perform their common tasks and exercise their stewardship over their God-given talents and possessions.

The first of these needs is a Christian channel for investing money. Thus far no one has made a study of the way Mennonites invest their money. . . . Many devout brothers are sincerely asking this question. Is there a place within the brotherhood where one may confidently invest his surplus funds in such a way as to be mutually beneficial to borrower and lender alike? . . .

The second urgent need for the development of mutual aid in our day is a systematic and orderly plan of providing financial assistance to young people in getting a vocational start in life. The group needing such help constitutes a minority, but it is an important minority. It is composed of individuals who have qualities of leadership and capacities to develop into useful Christian citizens but whose hopes are often shattered and capacities undeveloped because of lack of opportunity. There are those who have ability to farm but never get a chance; there are others with ability to manage business enterprises who never do because they have no chance to begin; there are those with alert minds and love of learning who never go on to school because of a lack of funds.

Such needy young people happen to be born into families where parents are unable to give their children the kind of help they need. If the necessary resources cannot be found within the circle of relatives, the logical place for young people to look for help is within the brotherhood of which they are members. At present some find help in the brotherhood but many do not. There is need for the establishment of a systematic plan of providing aid, a plan that is recognized by the whole brotherhood, so that those with money and those in need of money will understand and use the plan. . . .

The third need for mutual aid does not deal with money but rather with the general subject of information and counsel. . . . Not all well-meaning fathers are able to give sound vocational advice, and not all pastors are able to devote the time they would like to this phase of their work.

The suggestion here is that congregations might well consider the electing of mutual aid committees to assist in the carrying out of this mutual aid function. Such committees would not be all-wise, but if chosen from among those with demonstrated success in their own fields of work and proven devotion to the brotherhood and its young people, much good could be accomplished. Such local committees would not be a substitute for parental counsel but rather a supplement.

Mutual aid of these three types might be considered informal or spontaneous. There is no special organization or pattern to be generally followed. There may also be organized mutual aid as provided by smaller local cooperatives credit unions, profit-sharing enterprises, mutual insurance societies, and buria associations. . . .

What Mutual Aid Can Mean to the Church

> "If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone?" Luke 11:11.

In the discussion of mutual aid in the preceding pages, we have attemp ed to describe the nature of Christian mutual aid; we have tried to show that it has a Biblical basis and that it has been an integral part of the tradition, cus tom, and heritage of our people. We have attempted to indicate in a brief way t types of mutual aid and cooperative activities now being carried on, as well as the future needs and probable opportunities for its development. The basic ques tions of the "what," "where," and "how" of mutual aid have been discussed. . . .

Demonstration of Brotherhood

Mutual aid, motivated by the love of Christ in the hearts of professin believers, can demonstrate qualities of genuine Christian brotherhood. The worl is much more in need of an actual demonstration of brotherhood than it is in nee of theorizing longer about it. The world, today as always, is filled with sorro pain, suffering, fear, and uncertainty. Many are looking for a way out today as they were in the prophet Joel's time. He exclaimed, "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision." They turn to modern churches and many do not find an answer to their plight. The modern church often lacks the spiritual warmth, the spontaneous fervor and radiance that attracts non-believers into its fellowship. There is a need for the spiritual glow in the modern church that characterized t New Testament Christians to such an extent that pagans enviously remarked, "Beho how they love one another." Paul said to the Corinthians, "I will show you a fa better way." He was referring to the way of the Christ instead of the way of th world. It is our duty to point to that "better way."

The development of a mutual aid consciousness in the brotherhood will result in its strengthening. . . .

Develop Loyalty of Youth for the Church

The development of mutual aid within local congregations will mean tha we can count on a greater degree of loyalty and solidarity. Young people respec and support the church to about the same degree that the church helps them. If the church helps its young people, the young people will support the church. . .

If the church uses brotherhood only as an ideal, without giving realit to its meaning, youth will forsake the church and worship at other altars. The altar at which it will most likely worship, if not at the church altar, will be the altar of the state.

The government is rendering to its citizens increasingly more services in addition to the traditional services of protection by law, insurance against injustice, and maintenance of public utilities. Today the government provides hospital service, education from kindergarten to university, and, at the present time, a social security program to protect citizens from economic want from the

cradle to the grave. Social security means the guarantee of jobs and at least a minimum cash income on which a person may live. . . .

No one who is seriously interested in promoting the welfare of the church and the cause which it represents wishes to see this trend away from the church. It is, therefore, not only desirable but very urgent that the church establish a mutual aid program locally and denomination-wide for the purpose of assisting all, old and young, who are in need of such assistance. . . .

Reduce Materialistic Practices among Church Members

One of the serious defects of modern Christianity is its adoption of a philosophy of materialistic individualism. Mennonites, by and large, are as guilty of this as most other Christian groups. The only difference is that they adopted it more recently. This means, in a more simple language, that individual Christians have accepted the worldly view that it is every man's right to accumulate as much wealth as he can and spend it in any way he pleases without regard to what others may think, do, or need. Materialism is a view which measures everything in dollars and cents. It has little or no regard for the value of the unseen or spiritual things. This is basically a pagan, not a Christian, philosophy.

The tragedy of the situation today is that we find many Christians who roundly condemn materialism and, at the same time, embrace it. We are all guilty of this to a larger degree than we can properly justify before Christ and our commitments to him. . . .

This materialistic philosophy has developed slowly and subtly. It has been adopted along with many other secular and worldly practices on the basis of a little here and a little there until the whole of life has been beclouded with it. Materialistic practices have become so habitual that many brethren vigorously defend them as though they were an inherent part of the Christian philosophy....

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The purpose of all Christian mutual aid from the Mennonite standpoint is that it should strengthen the cause of Christ in the local community. Unless it serves this purpose, it misses the mark entirely. Christian mutual aid has both its beginning and its end in the body of Christ. It is the way through which the love of Christ manifests itself in the lives of his disciples. For then it is the natural expression of their love for him and for each other. It is not artificial or compulsory, but rather the spontaneous outpouring of the true Christian's desire to share and serve. It is the natural expression of love in action of the spiritually-reborn Christian.

When enough individuals allow this love to affect their everyday relations, the neighborhood and the community will gradually feel its effects. For this reason, the church is primarily interested in helping its young people become vocationally established in communities where there are Mennonite churches. In this way, it is able to build socially-solid and spiritually-strong Christian groups which in turn become industrious and law-abiding communities.

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